A

SERMON

PREACHED

On Occaſion of the DEATH of the

Rev. Mr. JOHN FLETCHER,

VICAR OF MADELEY, SHROPSHIRE.

BIBLIOTHECA · VINDOBONENSIS

By JOHN WESLEY, M. A.

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A

SERMON, &c.

PSALM xxxvii. 37.

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.

IN the preceding verſes taken together with this, there is a beautiful contraſt, between the death of a wicked, and that of a good man. *I myſelf*, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *have ſeen the ungodly in great power, and flouriſhing like a green bay-tree. I went by and lo he was gone: I ſought him but his place could no where be found.* Doſt thou deſire to be found happy, both in life and in death? Then *keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right: for that ſhall bring a man peace at the laſt.* The words are rendered in the new tranſlation, with far more force and elegance. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright! for the end of that man is peace.* It is not improbable that *David*, while he uttered theſe words, had a particular inſtance before his eyes. Such an inſtance was that of the great and good man, whom God has not long ago taken to himſelf.

In diſcourſing on theſe words, I purpoſe firſt, briefly to enquire, who is the perſon here ſpoken

of, *the perfect, the upright man?* I will endeavour, ſecondly to explain the promiſe, *That ſhall bring a man peace at the laſt:* or as it is expreſt in the other verſion, *The end of that man is peace.* I will then, with the divine aſſiſtance, ſhew a little more at large, in how glorious a manner it was fulfilled in the end of that *perfect and upright man* who has been lately removed from us.

I. 1. I am firſt, briefly to enquire, who is the perſon that is here ſpoken of, *the upright and perfect man?* In ſpeaking on this head, I ſhall not endeavour to deſcribe the character of an upright Jew: ſuch as *David* himſelf was, or any of thoſe holy men that lived under the Moſaic Diſpenſation: it more nearly imports us to conſider ſuch an upright man, as are thoſe that live under the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, ſuch as have lived and died ſince *life and immortality* have been *brought to light by the Goſpel.*

2. In this ſenſe, he is a perfect and upright man, who believes in the name of the Son of God: he is one in whom it has pleaſed the Father, to reveal the Son of his love: and who conſequently is able to declare, *the life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himſelf for me.* He is one that finds *the Spirit of God witneſſing with his ſpirit, that he is a child of God:* and unto whom *Jeſus Chriſt is made of God, wiſdom and righteouſneſs, and ſanctification, and redemption.*

3. This faith will undoubtedly *work by love.* Accordingly every Chriſtian Believer has *the love of God ſhed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Ghoſt which is given unto him.* And loving God, he loves his Brother alſo: his good will extends to every child of man. By this, as well as by the

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fruits of love, lowlineſs, meekneſs, and reſignation, he ſhews that there is the ſame *mind in him, which was in Chriſt Jeſus.*

4. As to his outward behaviour, the upright Chriſtian Believer, is blameleſs and unreproachable. He is holy, as Chriſt that has called him is holy in all manner of converſation: ever labouring to *have a conſcience void of offence, toward God and toward man.* He not only avoids all outward ſin, but *abſtains from all appearance of evil.* He ſteadily walks in all the public and private ordinances of the Lord blameleſs. He is zealous of good works; as he hath time doing good, in every kind and degree, to all men. And in the whole courſe of his life, he purſues one invariable rule, *whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, to do all to the glory of God.*

II. And ſurely *the end of this man is peace:* the meaning of which words we are now, in the ſecond place to conſider.

I do not conceive this immediately to refer to that glorious Peace, which is prepared for him in the preſence of God to all eternity: but rather to that which he will enjoy in the preſent world, before his ſpirit returns to God that gave it. Neither does it ſeem directly to refer to outward peace or deliverance from outward trouble: although it is true, many good men, who have been long buffeted by adverſity, and troubled on every ſide, have experienced an entire deliverance from it, and enjoyed a remarkable calm before they went hence. But this ſeems chiefly to refer to inward peace, even that *peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding.* Therefore it is no wonder, that it cannot be fully and adequately expreſſed in human language. We can only ſay, it is an un-

ſpeakable calmneſs and ſerenity of ſpirit, a tranquility in the blood of Chriſt, which keeps the ſouls of Believers, in their lateſt hour, even as a garriſon keeps a city; which keeps not only their hearts, all their paſſions and affections, but alſo their minds, all the motions of their underſtanding and imagination, and all the workings of their reaſon in *Chriſt Jeſus*. This peace they experienced in a higher or lower degree (ſuppoſe they continued in the faith) from the time they firſt found redemption in the blood of Jeſus, even the forgiveneſs of ſins. But when they have nearly finiſhed their courſe, it generally flows as a river, even in ſuch a degree, as it had not before entered into their hearts to conceive. A remarkable inſtance of this, out of a thouſand, occurred many years ago. *Enoch Williams*, one of the firſt of our Preachers that was ſtationed at *Cork* (who had received this peace when he was eleven years old, and never loſt it for an hour) after he had rejoiced in God with joy unſpeakable, during the whole courſe of his illneſs, was too much exhauſted to ſpeak many words, but juſt ſaid "Peace! Peace!" and died.

III. So was the Scripture fulfilled. But it was far more glorioufly fulfilled in that late eminent ſervant of God; as will clearly appear if we conſider a few circumſtances firſt of his life, and ſecondly, in his triumphant death.

1. Indeed we have as yet but a very imperfect knowledge of his life. We know little more of his early years, than that he was from his infancy ſo remarkably regardleſs of food, that he would ſcarce take enough to ſuſtain life; and that he had always much of the fear of God, and a real ſenſe of religion. He was born September 12, in the year 1729, at *Nyon*, in *Switzerland*, of a very reputable family. He went through the

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uſual courſe of academical ſtudies, in the Univerſity of *Geneva*. One of his Uncles who was at that time a General Officer in the Imperial ſervice, then invited him into the ſame ſervice, promiſing to procure him a commiſſion. But juſt as he came into *Germany*, the war was at an end. Being ſo far on his way, he was then invited into *Holland*, by another Uncle, who had a little before been deſired by a correſpondent in *England*, to procure a Tutor for a Gentleman's ſons. He aſked Mr. *Fletcher* whether he was willing to go into *England*, and undertake this office? He conſented, and accordingly went over to *England*, and undertook the care of Mr. *Hill's* two ſons, at *Tern*, in *Shropſhire:* and he continued in that office, till the young gentlemen went to the Univerſity.

2. When Mr. *Hill* went up to *London*, to attend the Parliament, he took his Lady and Mr. *Fletcher* with him. While they were dining at *St. Alban's*, he walked out into the town, but did not return, till the coach was ſet out for *London*. However a ſaddle-horſe being left, he came after, and overtook them on the ſame evening. Mrs. *Hill* aſking him, "Why he ſtayed behind?" He ſaid, "I was walking through the market-place, and I heard a poor old woman talk ſo ſweetly of Jeſus Chriſt, that I knew not how the time paſt away." "I will be hanged, ſaid Mrs. *Hill*, if our Tutor does not turn Methodiſt by and by!" "Methodiſt, Madam, ſaid he, pray what is that?" She replied, "Why, the Methodiſts are a people that do nothing but pray. They are praying all day and all night." "Are they, ſaid he? Then with the help of God, I will find them out, if they be above ground." He did not long after find them out and had his deſire, being admitted into the Society. While he was

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in town he met in Mr. *Edward's* Claſs, and loſt no opportunity of meeting. And he retained a peculiar regard for Mr. *Edwards*, to the day of his death.

3. It was not long before he was preſt in ſpirit, to call ſinners to repentance. Seeing the world all around him lying in wickedneſs, he found an earneſt deſire

" To pluck poor brands out of the fire,
To ſnatch them from the verge of hell."

And though he was yet far from being perfect in the *Engliſh* tongue, particularly with regard to the pronunciation of it, yet the earneſtneſs with which he ſpake, ſeldom to be ſeen in *England*, and the unſpeakably tender affection which breathed in every word and geſture to poor, loſt ſinners, made ſo deep an impreſſion on all that heard, that very few went empty away.

4. About the year 1753, (being now of a ſufficient age) he was ordained Deacon and Prieſt, and ſoon after preſented to the little Living of *Madeley*, in *Shropſhire*. This, he had frequently ſaid, was the only Living which he ever deſired to have. He was ordained at *Whitehall*, and the ſame day, being informed that I had no one to aſſiſt me at *Weſt-Street* Chappel, he came away as ſoon as ever the Ordination was over, and aſſiſted me in the adminiſtration of the Lord's Supper. And he was now doubly diligent in preaching, not only in the Chappels at *Weſt-Street* and *Spitalfields*, but wherever the Providence of God opened a door to proclaim the everlaſting Goſpel. This he did frequently in *French* (as well as in *Engliſh*) of which all Judges allowed him to be a compleat Maſter.

5. Hence he removed into the Vicarage Houſe at *Madeley*. Here he was fully employed among his

his parishioners, both in the town and in *Madeley* Wood, a mile or two from it, a place much resembling *Kingswood*, almost wholly inhabited by poor Colliers, and their numerous families. These forlorn ones, (little wiser than the beasts that perish) he took great pains to reform and instruct. And they are now as judicious and as well-behaved a people, as most of their station in the three kingdoms.

6. But after some time he was prevailed upon by the Countess of *Huntingdon*, to leave his beloved retreat, and remove into *Wales*, in order to superintend her School at *Trevecka*. This he did, with all his power, instructing the young men both in learning and philosophy: till he received a letter from the Countess, together with the circular letter, signed by Mr. *Shirley*, summoning all that feared God in *England* to meet together at *Bristol*, at the time of the Methodist Conference, "in order to bear testimony against the *dreadful heresy* contained in the Minutes of the preceding Conference." Her Ladyship declared, that all who did not absolutely renounce those Eight Propositions which were contained in the Minutes of that Conference, must immediately leave her house. Mr. *Fletcher* was exceedingly surprised at this peremptory declaration. He spent the next day in fasting and prayer, and in the evening wrote to her Ladyship, that he not only could not utterly renounce, but must entirely approve of all those Eight Propositions, and therefore had obeyed her order, by leaving her house, and returning to his own at *Madeley*.

7. That circular letter was the happy occasion of his writing those excellent *Checks to Antinomianism*, in which one knows not which to admire most, the purity of the language, (such as a foreigner

foreigner ſcarce ever wrote before) the ſtrength and clearneſs of the argument, or the mildneſs, and ſweetneſs of the ſpirit, which breathes throughout the whole. Inſomuch that I nothing wonder at a Clergyman that was reſolved never to part with his dear Decrees, who being preſt to read them, replied, "No, I will never read Mr. *Fletcher's* Writings; for if I did, I ſhould be of his mind." He now likewiſe wrote ſeveral other valuable Tracts. Mean time he was more abundant in his miniſterial labours, both in public and private, viſiting his whole pariſh, early and late, in all weathers, regarding neither heat nor cold, rain nor ſnow, whether he was on horſeback or on foot. But this inſenſibly weakened his conſtitution, and ſapped the foundation of his health; which was ſtill more effectually done, by his intenſe and uninterrupted ſtudies: at which he frequently continued with ſcarce any intermiſſion, fourteen, fifteen, or ſixteen hours a day. Mean time he did not allow himſelf neceſſary food: he ſeldom took any regular meals, unleſs he had company; but twice or thrice in four and twenty hours, ate ſome bread and cheeſe, or fruit: inſtead of which he took a draught of milk, and then wrote on again. When one reproved him for this, for not allowing himſelf a ſufficiency of neceſſary food, he replied with ſurpriſe, "Not allow myſelf food? Why our food ſeldom coſts my Houſekeeper and me, leſs than two ſhillings a week."

8. Being informed that his health was greatly impaired, I judged nothing was ſo likely to reſtore it as a long journey. So I propoſed his taking a journey with me into *Scotland*, to which he willingly conſented. We ſet out in ſpring, and after travelling eleven or twelve hundred miles, returned to *London* in autumn. I verily believe,

believe, had he travelled with me a few months longer, he would have quite recovered his health. But being ſtopped by his friends, he quickly relapſed, and fell into a true pulmonary Conſumption.

9. But this ſickneſs was not unto death. It was only ſent that the glory of the Lord might appear. During the whole courſe of it he remained at *Newington*, and was viſited by perſons of all ranks. And they all marvelled at the grace of God that was in him. In all his pain no complaint came out of his mouth: but his every breath was ſpent, either in praiſing God, or exhorting and comforting his neighbour.

10. When nothing elſe availed, he was adviſed to take a journey by ſea and by land into his own country. He did this, in company with Mr. *Ireland*, a well tried and faithful friend, who loved him as a brother, and thought no pains ill beſtowed, if he could preſerve ſo valluable a life. He reſided in his own country about a year, and was a bleſſing to all that were round about him. Being much recovered, he ſpent ſome months in *France*, and then returned in perfect health to *Madeley*.

11. In the year 1781, with the full approbation of all his friends, he married Miſs *Boſanquet*: of whom, as ſhe is ſtill alive, I ſay no more at preſent, than that ſhe was the only perſon in *England*, whom I judged to be worthy of Mr. *Fletcher*. By her tender and judicions care, his health was confirmed more and more. And I am firmly convinced that had he uſed this health, in travelling all over the kingdom, five, or ſix, or ſeven months every year (for which never was man more eminently qualified; no, not Mr. *Whitefield* himſelf) he would have done more good, than any other man in *England*. I cannot doubt but this

this would have been the more excellent way. However, though he did not accept of this honour, he did abundance of good in that narrower ſphere of action which he choſe: and was a pattern well worthy the imitation of all the Parochial Miniſters in the kingdom.

12. His manner of life during the time that he and his wife lived together, it may be moſt ſatisfactory to give in her own words.

"It is no little grief to me, that my dearly beloved huſband has left no account of himſelf in writing. And I am not able to give many particulars of a life the moſt angelical I have ever known."

"He was born at *Nyon*, in the Canton of *Berne* in *Switzerland*. In his infancy he diſcovered a lively genius, and great tenderneſs of heart. One day, having offended his father, who threatened to correct him, he kept himſelf at a diſtance in the garden, till ſeeing his father approach, and fearing his anger would be renewed by the ſight of him, he ran away. But he was preſently ſtruck with a deep remorſe, thinking, "What! Do I run away from my father? What a wicked wretch? It may be I may live to grow up and have a ſon that will run away from *me!*" And it was ſome years before the impreſſion of ſorrow, then made upon him wore off.

"When he was about ſeven years old, he was reproved by his nurſe-maid ſaying, "You are a naughty boy, and the devil takes all ſuch." After he was in bed, he began to reflect on her words, his heart ſmote him, and he ſaid, "I am a naughty boy, and perhaps God will let the devil fetch me away." He got up on the bed, and for a conſiderable time, wreſtled with God in prayer, till he felt ſuch a ſenſe of the love of God, as made him quite eaſy.

(Part of the next paragraph I omit, being nearly the ſame with what I inſerted before.)

" When he entered Mr. *Hill's* family, he did not know Chriſt in his heart. One Sunday evening, as he was writing ſome muſic, the ſervant came in to make up the fire, and looking at him ſaid, " Sir, I am very ſorry to ſee you ſo employed on the Lord's day." He immediately put away his muſic, and from that hour became a ſtrict obſerver of that holy day.

" Not long after he met with a perſon, who aſked him, to go with her and hear the Methodiſts. He readily conſented. The more he heard, the more uneaſy he grew: and doubling his diligence, he hoped by *doing much* to render himſelf acceptable to God: till one day hearing Mr. *Green* he was convinced he did not know what true faith was. This occaſioned many reflections in his mind. " Is it poſſible (ſaid he) that I who have made divinity my ſtudy, and have received *the premium of piety* (ſo called) from the Univerſity for my writings on divine ſubjects; that I ſhould ſtill be ſo ignorant, as not to know what Faith is! " But the more he examined, the more he was convinced: then ſin revived, and hope died away. He now fought by the moſt rigorous auſterities to conquer an evil nature, and bring heaven-born peace into his ſoul. But the more he ſtruggled, the more he was convinced, that all his fallen ſoul was ſin, and that nothing but a revelation of the love of Jeſus could make him a Chriſtian. For this he groaned with unwearied aſſiduity: till one day, after much wreſtling with God, lying proſtrate on his face before the throne, he felt the application of the blood of Jeſus. Now his bonds were broken, and his free ſoul began to breathe a pure air.

Sin was beneath his feet, and he could triumph in the Lord, the God of his ſalvation.

" From this time he walked valiantly in the ways of God; and thinking he had not leizure enough in the day, he made it a conſtant rule, to ſit up two nights in a week, for reading, prayer and meditation, in order to ſink deeper into that communion with God, which was become his ſoul's delight. Mean time he took only vegetable food, and for above ſix months, lived wholly on bread, with milk and water.

" Notwithſtanding the nights he ſat up, he made it a rule, never to ſleep, as long as he could poſſibly keep awake. For this purpoſe, he always took a candle and book to bed with him. But one night being overcome of ſleep, before he had put out the candle, he dreamed his curtains, pillow, and cap were on fire, without doing him any harm. And ſo it was. In the morning, part of his curtains, pillow and cap, were burnt. But not an hair of his head was ſinged. So did God give his angels charge over him!

" Sometime after he was favoured with a particular manifeſtation of the love of God: ſo powerful, that it appeared to him, as if body and ſoul would be ſeparated. Now all his deſires centered in one, that of devoting himſelf to the ſervice of his precious Maſter. This he thought he could do beſt, by entering into Orders. God made his way plain, and he ſoon after ſettled in *Madeley*. He received this pariſh as from the immediate hand of God, and unweariedly laboured therein, and in the adjacent places, till he had ſpent himſelf in his Maſter's ſervice, and was ripening faſt for glory. Much oppoſition he met with for many years, and often his life was in danger. Sometimes he was inwardly conſtrained

ſtrained to warn obſtinate ſinners, that if they did not repent the hand of God would cut them off. And the event proved the truth of the prediction. But notwithſtanding all their oppoſition, many were the ſeals of his miniſtry.

" He had an earneſt deſire that the pure goſpel ſhould remain among his people, after he was taken away. For this purpoſe he ſurmounted great difficulties in building the houſe in *Madeley* Wood. He not only ſaved for it the laſt farthing he had, but when he was abroad propoſed to let the Vicarage-Houſe, (deſigning at his return to live in a little cottage near it) and appropriating the rent of it for clearing that houſe.

" Since the time I had the honour and happineſs of living with him, every day made me more ſenſible of the mighty work of the Spirit upon him. The fruits of this were manifeſt in all his life and converſation, but in nothing more than in his meekneſs and humility. It was a meekneſs which no affront could move: an humility which loved to be unknown, forgotten and deſpiſed.* How hard is it to find an eminent perſon who loves an Equal? But his delight was, in preferring others to himſelf. It appeared ſo natural in him, that it ſeemed as his meat, to ſet every one before himſelf. He ſpake not of the fault of an abſent perſon, but when neceſſity; and then with the utmoſt caution. He made no account of his own labours, and perhaps carried to an extreme, his diſlike of hearing them mentioned.

" Patience is the daughter of Humility. In him it diſcovered itſelf in a manner which I with I could either deſcribe or imitate. It produced in him a ready mind to embrace every Croſs with

* I think this was going to an extreme.

alacrity and pleaſure. And for the good of his neighbour, (the poor in particular) nothing ſeemed hard, nothing wearisome. When I have been grieved to call him out of his ſtudy, from his cloſet-work two or three times in an hour, he would anſwer, "O my Dear, never think of that: it matters not what we do, ſo we are always ready to meet the will of God: 'tis only conformity to this, which makes any employment excellent."

"He had a ſingular love for the Lambs of the flock, the Children, and applied himſelf with the greateſt diligence to their inſtruction, for which he had a peculiar gift: and this populous pariſh found him full exerciſe for it. The pooreſt met with the ſame attention from him as the rich. For their ſakes he almoſt grudged himſelf neceſſaries, and often expreſſed a pain in uſing them, while any of his pariſh wanted them.

"But while I mention his meekneſs and love, let me not forget the peculiar favour of his Maſter, in giving him the moſt firm and reſolute *courage*. In reproving ſin and daring ſinners; he was a *Son of Thunder*, and regarded neither fear nor favour, when he had a meſſage from God to deliver.

"With reſpect to his communion with God, 'tis much to be lamented that we have no account of it from his own pen. But thus far I can ſay, it was his conſtant care, to keep an uninterrupted ſenſe of the Divine preſence. In order to this he was ſlow of ſpeech, and had the exacteſt government of his words. To this he was ſo inwardly attentive, as ſometimes to appear ſtupid to thoſe who knew him not: though few converſed in a more lively manner, when he judged it would be for the glory of God. It was his continual endeavour to draw up his own and

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every other ſpirit, to an immediate intercourſe with God. And all his intercourſe with me, was ſo mingled with prayer and praiſe, that every employment and every meal, was as it were, perfumed therewi h. He often ſaid, "'Tis a very little thing, ſo to hang upon God by faith, as to feel no departure from him. But I want to be filled with the fullneſs of his ſpirit. I feel, ſaid he, ſometimes ſuch gleams of light, as it were waſts of heavenly air, as ſeem ready to take my ſoul with them to glory. A little before his laſt illneſs, when the fever began to rage among us, he preached a ſermon on the duty of viſiting the ſick, wherein he ſaid, what do you fear? Are you afraid of catching the diſtemper and dying! O fear it no more! What an honour to die in your Maſter's work! If permitted to me, I ſhould account it a ſingular favour." In his former illneſs he wrote thus, "I calmly wait in unſhaken reſignation, for the full ſalvation of God; ready to venture on his faithful love, and on the ſure mercies of David. His time is beſt, and is my time: Death has loſt its ſting. And I bleſs God, I know not what hurry of ſpirits is, or unbelieving fears."

"For his laſt months he ſcarce ever lay down or roſe up without theſe words in his mouth,

I nothing have, I nothing am,
My treaſure's in the bleeding Lamb
Both now and evermore.

"In one of the letters which he wrote ſome time ſince to his dear people of *Madeley*, ſome of his words are, "I leave this bleſſed iſland for awhile; but I truſt I ſhall never leave the kingdom of God—the ſhadow of Chriſt's Croſs, the clefts of the Rock, ſmitten and pierced for us.

There I meet you in ſpirit: thence I truſt I ſhall joyfully leap into the ocean of eternity, to go and join thoſe miniſtring ſpirits, who wait on the heirs of ſalvation. And if I am no more allowed to miniſter to you on earth, I rejoice at the thought that I ſhall perhaps be allowed to accompany the angels, who (if you abide in the faith) will be commiſſioned to carry you into Abraham's boſom."

" The thought enlivens my faith! Lord give me to walk in his ſteps! Then ſhall I ſee him again, and my heart ſhall rejoice, and we ſhall eternally behold the Lamb together. Faith brings near the welcome moment! And now He beckons me away! And Jeſus bids me come!"

I know not that any thing can or need be added to this, but Mrs. *Fletcher*'s Account of his Death: which follows alſo in her own words.

" For ſome time before his late illneſs, he was particularly penetrated with the nearneſs of eternity. There was ſcarce an hour in which he was not calling upon us, to drop every thought and every care, that we might attend to nothing, but drinking deeper into God. We ſpent much time in wreſtling with God, and were led in a peculiar manner, to abandon our whole ſelves into the hands of God, to do or ſuffer whatever was pleaſing to him.

" On Thurſday, Aug. 4, he was employed in the work of God, from three in the afternoon till nine at night. When he came home he ſaid, "I have taken cold." On Friday and Saturday he was not well, but ſeemed uncommonly drawn out in prayer. On Saturday night his fever appeared very ſtrong. I begged him not to go to church in the morning: but he told me, " It was the will of the Lord;" in which caſe I never dared to perſuade. In reading prayers he almoſt fainted away.

away. I got through the croud, and intreated him to come out of the desk. But he let me and others know, in his sweet manner, that we were not to interrupt the order of God. I then retired to my pew, where all around me were in tears. When he was a little refreshed by the windows being opened he went on; and then preached with a strength and recollection that surprised us all.

"After sermon he went up to the communion Table with these words, "I am going to throw myself under the wings of the Cherubim, before the Mercy-seat." The service held till near two. Sometimes he could scarce stand, and was often obliged to stop. The people were deeply affected: weeping was on every side. Gracious Lord! How was it my soul was kept so calm in the midst of the most tender feelings? Notwithstanding his extreme weakness, he gave out several verses of hymns, and lively sentences of exhortation. When service was over, we hurried him to bed, where he immediately fainted away. He afterward dropt into a sleep for some time and on waking cried out with a pleasant smile, "Now, my Dear, thou seest I am no worse for doing the Lord's work: he never fails me when I trust in him." Having got a little dinner, he dozed most of the evening, now and then waking full of the praises of God. At night his fever returned, though not violent; but his strength decreased amazingly. On Monday and Tuesday we had a little paradise together: he lay on a couch in the study, and though often changing posture, was sweetly pleasant, and frequently slept a good while. When awake, he delighted in hearing me read hymns and tracts on Faith and Love. His words were all animating, and his patience beyond expression. When he had any nauseous medicines to take, he seemed to

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enjoy the croſs, according to a word he uſed often to repeat, that we are to ſeek a perfect conformity to the will of God, and leave him to give us what comfort he ſaw good. I aſked him, whether he had any advice to leave me, if he ſhould be taken from me? He replied, "I have nothing particular to ſay, the Lord will open all before thee." I ſaid, "Have you any conviction, that God is about to take you?" He ſaid, "No, not in particular, only I always ſee Death ſo inexpreſſibly near, that we both ſeem to ſtand on the very verge of eternity." While he ſlept a little, I beſought the Lord, if it was his good pleaſure, to ſpare him to me a little longer. But my prayer ſeemed to have no wings, and I could not help mingling continually therewith, "Lord, give me perfect reſignation." This uncertainty made me tremble, leſt God was going to put into my hand, the bitter cup with which he lately threatened my huſband. Some weeks before, I myſelf was ill of the fever. My huſband then felt the whole parting ſcene, and ſtruggled for perfect reſignation. He ſaid, "O Polly, ſhall I ever ſee the day when thou muſt be carried out to bury? How will the little things which thy tender care has prepared for me in every part of the houſe, how will they wound and diſtreſs me? How is it? I think, I feel jealouſy! I am jealous of the worms. I ſeem to ſhrink at giving my dear Polly to the worms!"

"Now all theſe reflections returned upon my heart, with the weight of a millſtone. I cried to the Lord, and thoſe words were deeply impreſſed on my ſpirit, *Where I am, there ſhall my ſervants be, that they may behold my glory.* This promiſe was full of comfort to my ſoul. I ſaw that in Chriſt's immediate preſence was our home, and that we ſhould find our re-union in being deeply centered

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in Him. I received it as a freſh marriage for eternity. As ſuch, I truſt for ever to hold it. All that day, whenever I thought of that expreſſion, *to behold my glory*, it ſeemed to wipe away every tear, and was as the ring whereby we were joined anew.

" Awaking ſome time after he ſaid, " Polly, I have been thinking, it was Iſrael's fault, that they aſked for *ſigns*. We will not do ſo, but abandoning our whole ſelves into the hands of God, will lie patiently before him, aſſured that he will do all things well."

" My dear Love, ſaid I, if ever I have done or ſaid any thing to grieve thee, how will the remembrance wound my heart, ſhouldſt thou be taken from me!"

" He intreated and charged me, with inexpreſſible tenderneſs, not to allow the thought; declaring his thankfulneſs for our union, in a variety of words written on my heart as with the adamantine pen of friendſhip deeply dipt in blood."

" On Wedneſday, after groaning all day under the weight of the power of God, he told me he had received ſuch a manifeſtation of the full meaning of thoſe words, *God is Love*, as he could never be able to tell. *It fills me*, ſaid he, *every moment. O Polly, my dear Polly, God is Love.*" Shout, ſhout, aloud! I want a guſt of praiſe to go to the ends of the earth. But it ſeems as if I could not ſpeak much longer. Let us fix on a ſign between ourſelves: (tapping me twice with his fingers, now I mean "God is Love. And we will draw each other into God. Obſerve! By this we will draw each other into God."

" Sally coming in, he cried out, " O Sally, God is Love. Shout both of you: I want to hear you, ſhout his praiſe." All this time the medical friend

friend who diligently attended him, hoped he was in no danger; as he had no bad head-ach, much ſleep, without the leaſt delirium, and an almoſt regular pulſe. So was the diſeaſe though commiſſioned to take his life, reſtrained by the power of God.

" On Thurſday his ſpeech began to fail. While he was able, he ſpoke to all that came in his way. Hearing a ſtranger was in the houſe, he ordered her to be called up, though uttering two ſentences almoſt made him faint. To his friendly Doctor he would not be ſilent, while he had any power of ſpeech: after ſaying, " O Sir, you take much thought for my body: give me leave to take thought for your ſoul." When I could ſcarce underſtand any thing he ſaid, I ſpoke theſe words, *God is love.* Inſtantly, as if all his powers were awakened, he broke out in a rapture, " God is Love! Love! Love! O for that guſt of praiſe I want to ſound!" Here his voice again failed. He ſuff red many ways; but with ſuch patience, as none but thoſe then preſent can conceive. If I named his ſufferings he would ſmile and make the ſign.

" On Friday, finding his body covered with ſpots, I felt a ſword pierce through my ſoul. As I was kneeling by his ſide with my hand in his, entreating the Lord to be with us in this tremendous hour, he ſtrove to ſay many things, but could not: preſſing my hand, and often repeating the ſign. At laſt he breathed out, *Head of the Church be Head to my wife!* When for a few moments I was forced to leave him, Sally ſaid to him, " My dear Maſter, do you know me?" He replied, " Sally, God will put his right hand under you." She added, " O my dear Maſter, ſhould you be taken away, what a diſconſolate creature will my poor dear Miſtreſs be?" He replied, " God will be

be her all in all." He had always delighted much in theſe words,

" Jeſu's blood through earth and ſkies,
Mercy, free, boundleſs mercy cries."

Whenever I repeated them to him, he would anſwer, *Boundleſs! boundleſs! boundleſs!* He now added, though with great difficulty,

" Mercy's full power I *ſoon* ſhall prove,
Loved with an everlaſting love."

" On Saturday afternoon his fever ſeemed quite off, and a few friends ſtanding near the bed, he reached his hand to each, and looking on a Miniſter, ſaid, " Are you ready to aſſiſt to-morrow?" His recollection ſurpriſed us, as the day of the week had not been named in his room. Many believed he would recover: and one ſaid, " Do you think the Lord will raiſe you up?" He ſtrove to anſwer, ſaying, " Raiſe me in the reſurr"—meaning in the reſurrection. To another, aſking the ſame queſtion, he ſaid, *I leave it all to God.*

" In the evening, the fever returned with violence, and the mucus falling on his throat almoſt ſtrangled him. It was ſuppoſed the ſame painful emotion, would grow more and more violent to the laſt. As I felt this exquiſitely, I cried to the Lord to remove it; and glory be to his name, he did. From that time it returned no more. As night drew on, I perceived him dying very faſt. His fingers could hardly make the ſign, (which he ſcarce ever forgot) and his ſpeech ſeemed quite gone. I ſaid, " My dear creature, I aſk not for myſelf, *I know thy ſoul*; but for the ſake of others. If Jeſus is very preſent with thee, lift thy right hand."

hand." He did. "If the proſpect of glory ſweetly opens before thee repeat the ſign." He immediately raiſed it again: and in half a minute, a ſecond time: he then threw it up, as if he would reach the top of the bed. After this, his dear hands moved no more: but on my ſaying, "Art thou in much pain? He anſwered, No." From this time he lay in a kind of ſleep, though with his eyes open and fixt. For the moſt part he ſat upright againſt pillows, with his head a little inclining to one ſide. And ſo remarkably compoſed and triumphant was his countenance, that the leaſt trace of death was ſcarce diſcernible in it.

"Twenty-four hours he was in this ſituation, breathing like a perſon in common ſleep. About thirty-five minutes paſt ten on Sunday night, Auguſt 14th. his precious ſoul entered into the joy of his Lord, without one ſtruggle or groan, in the fifty-ſixth year of his age.

"And here I break off my mournful ſtory: but on my bleeding heart, the fair picture of his heavenly excellence will be for ever drawn. When I call to mind his ardent zeal, his laborious endeavours to ſeek and ſave the loſt, his diligence in the employment of his time, his Chriſt like condeſcenſion toward me, and his uninterrupted converſe with heaven; I may well be allowed to add my loſs is beyond the power of words to paint. I have gone *through deep waters*: but all my afflictions were nothing compared to this. Well: I want no pleaſant proſpect, but upwards; nor any thing whereon to fix my hope, but immortality.

"On the 17th, his dear remains were depoſited in *Madeley* Church yard, amid the tears and lamentations of thouſands. The ſervice was performed by the Rev. Mr. *Hatton*, Rector of *Waters-Upton* whom

whom God enabled to ſpeak in a pathetic manner to his weeping flock. In the concluſion, at my requeſt, he read the following paper.

"As it was the deſire of my beloved Huſband to be buried in this plain manner, ſo out of tenderneſs he begged, that I might not be preſent. And in all things I would obey him.

"Permit me then by the mouth of a friend, to bear my open teſtimony, to the glory of God, that I who have known him in the moſt perfect manner, am conſtrained to declare, that I never knew any one walk ſo cloſely in the ways of God as he did. The Lord gave him a conſcience tender as the apple of an eye. He literally preferred the intereſt of every one to his own.

"He was rigidly juſt, but perfectly looſe from all attachment to the world. He ſhared *his all* with the poor, who lay ſo cloſe to his heart, that at the approach of death, when he could not ſpeak without difficulty, he cried out, "*O my poor! What will become of my poor?*" He was bleſt with ſo great a degree of humility, as is ſcarce to be found. I am witneſs, how often he has rejoiced, in being treated with contempt. Indeed it ſeemed the very food of his ſoul, to be little and unknown. When he deſired me to write a line to his Brother, if he died, I replying, "I will write him all the Lord's dealings with thee:" "No, no, ſaid he: write nothing about me. I only deſire to be forgotten. *God is all!*"

"His zeal for ſouls I need not tell *you*. Let the labours of twenty five years, and a Martyr's death in the concluſion, imprint it on your hearts. His diligent viſitation of the ſick occaſioned the fever, which by God's commiſſion tore him from you and me. And his vehement deſire to take his laſt leave of you, with dying lips and hands, gave, it is ſuppoſed the finiſhing ſtroke, by preparing his

blood for putrefaction. Thus has he lived and died your Servant. And will any of you refuſe to meet him at God's right hand in that day ?

" He walked with death always in ſight. About two months ago he came to me and ſaid, " My dear Love, I know not how it is, but I have a ſtrange impreſſion, Death is very near us, as if it would be ſome ſudden ſtroke upon one of us. And it draws out all my ſoul in prayer, that we may be ready. He then broke out, " Lord, prepare the ſoul thou wilt call. And O ſtand by the poor diſconſolate one that ſhall be left behind ! '

" A few days before his departure, he was filled with love in an uncommon manner, ſaying to me, " I have had ſuch a diſcovery of the depth of that word, *God is Love*, I cannot tell thee half. O ſhout his praiſe." The ſame he teſtified, as long as he had a voice, and continued to teſtify to the end, by a moſt lamb-like patience, in which he ſmiled over death, and ſet his laſt ſeal to the glorious truths he had ſo long preached among you."

" Three years, nine months and two days, I have poſſeſſed my heavenly-minded huſband. But now the ſun of my earthly joy is ſet for ever, and my ſoul filled with an anguiſh, which only finds its conſolation in a total reſignation to the will of God. When I was aſking the Lord, if he pleaſed to ſpare him to me a little longer, the following promiſe was impreſt on my mind with great power (in the accompliſhment of which *I look for our reunion*) " Where I am, there ſhall my ſervants be, that they may behold my glory." Lord, haſten the hour."

There is little need of adding any farther character of this man of God, to the foregoing account, given by one who wrote out of the fulneſs of her heart. I would only obſerve, that for many years I deſpaired of finding any inhabitant of

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Great-Britain, that could ſtand in any degree of compariſon, with *Gregory Lopez*, or Monſieur de *Renty*. But let any impartial perſon judge, if Mr. *Fletcher* was at all inferior to them? Did he not experience as deep communion with God, and as high a meaſure of inward Holineſs, as was experienced either by one or the other of thoſe burning and ſhining lights? And it is certain his outward Holineſs ſhone before men, with full as bright a luſtre as theirs. But if any ſhould attempt to draw a parallel between them there are two circumſtances that deſerve conſideration. One is, we are not aſſured, that the Writers of *their* lives, did not extenuate, if not ſuppreſs what was amiſs in them. And ſome things amiſs we are aſſured there were, namely, many touches of Superſtition, and ſome of Idolatry, in worſhipping Saints, the Virgin *Mary* in particular. But I have not ſuppreſſed or extenuated any thing in Mr. *Fletcher's* Character. For indeed I knewn othing that was amiſs, nothing that needed to be extenuated, much leſs ſuppreſſed. A ſecond circumſtance is, that the Writers of *their* lives, could not have ſo full a knowledge of them, as both Mrs. *Fletcher* and I had of Mr. *Fletcher's* being eye and ear-witneſſes of his whole conduct. Conſequently we know, that his Life was not ſullied with any mixture of either Idolatry or Superſtition. I was intimately acquainted with him for above thirty years. I converſed with him morning, noon, and night, without the leaſt reſerve, during a journey of many hundred miles. And in all that time, I never heard him ſpeak one improper word, nor ſaw him do an improper action.—To conclude. Many exemplary men have I known, holy in heart and life, within fourſcore years. But one equal to him, I have not known: one ſo inwardly and outwardly devoted to God. So unblamable a character in every reſpect I have not found either

either in *Europe* or *America*. Nor do I expect to find another ſuch, on this ſide of Eternity.

As it is poſſible we all may be ſuch as he was, let us endeavour to follow him as he followed Chriſt!

Norwich, Oct. 24, 1785.

His EPITAPH.

Here lies the Body of
The Rev. JOHN WILLIAM de la FLECHERE,
Vicar of *Madeley*.
Who was born at *Nyon*, in *Switzerland*,
September the twelfth, 1729,
And finiſhed his courſe Auguſt the 14th, 1785,
In this Village,
Where his unexampled Labours
Will never be forgotten.
He exerciſed his Miniſtry for the ſpace of 25 Years
In this Pariſh,
With uncommon Zeal and Ability.
But though many believed his report,
Yet he might with juſtice have adopted
The Lamentation of the Prophet,
All the Day long have I ſtretched out my Hands
Unto a diſobedient and gain-ſaying People:
Yet ſurely my Judgment is with the Lord,
And my Work with my God.

FINIS.